



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

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CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

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Preserve Overtime Rights: New Rules Undermine Hard Work **By Congressman Ron Kind**

As we observe another Labor Day, it is a good opportunity to remember how far we have come in protecting the rights of working men and working women across Wisconsin and across our country. But it is also important we remember how far we still need to go and how we must constantly fight to protect employee rights in the workplace.

I understand personally how important it is to protect the rights of working people to earn fair wages for their labor, including overtime pay for extra hours worked. As a young man and member of the International Longshoreman and Warehouse Union, I would put in five 9s and an 8 and it is because of the overtime pay I earned that I was able to afford to make ends meet and pay for my education. That extra hour at the end of the day and the eight on Saturday made a real and immediate difference for me.

Unfortunately, the right to overtime pay has suffered a major setback that I tried to prevent. Last month, the Bush administration revised the rules regarding which workers must receive overtime pay, or time-and-a-half, for hours over 40 worked in a single week. Though administration officials claim the new rules are a simplification of the old ones, the truth is that these changes are the opening salvo in a larger campaign to gut overtime pay laws altogether.

The new rules make an overdue update to the annual salary level- from \$8,060 to \$23,660- below which salaried workers are guaranteed overtime pay. This increase in the protective salary threshold is an important step forward, but that progress is offset by a new set of draconian rules that make it legal for employers in a broad spectrum of industries across the U.S. economy to stop paying their workers overtime.

According to an analysis by the nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute, 6 million workers nationwide are at risk to lose their overtime pay. Nursery school teachers, short-order cooks, reporters, administrative staff in financial services firms, IT employees, and many other classifications of workers also stand to lose the extra pay they earn today, even if they have no supervisory duties at all.

Among the large number of families for whom overtime pay constitutes roughly one-quarter of their income, these changes will have immediate and harmful consequences. Without overtime pay, these families will struggle to pay for the mortgage, health insurance premiums and co-payments, utility bills, and even groceries.

While I am confident that many of the good small and large businesses in my district would not use this to take advantage of workers, unfortunately, there are employers in other parts of the country who would. The 40-hour work week was established over 65 years ago to protect workers and give

them time to be with their families. Good jobs and quality family time create stable households for our children and now is not the time to take a giant leap backward.

All employees who receive notice from their employer that they are going to lose their overtime pay should make sure that their Representative and Senators in Washington know about it. We weren't able to stop the new rules this time, but the fight is long from over. This pay cut for America's hard workers must not be allowed to stand, and new gimmicks must not be allowed to become policy.